

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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September 9, 2013

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Shimkus
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Chairman Shimkus:

Over the last several months, news reports have painted a troubling picture of the situation at the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan. Japanese officials and the plant operator are struggling not only to stabilize the reactors but to manage huge volumes of radioactive water, some of which is leaking into the Pacific Ocean. We are writing to request that you schedule a hearing to examine the status of the Fukushima plant and any lessons the United States can learn from Japan's response to these serious challenges.

For more than two years, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) has been spraying large volumes of cooling water on the crippled Fukushima reactors and storing the wastewater in pits and hundreds of makeshift storage tanks. This spring, Tepco announced that the pits had begun leaking, allowing radioactive water to seep into the soil.¹ Last month, Tepco announced that at least one of the tanks had leaked 300 tons of water laced with radioactive strontium.² Plant operators have measured radiation near these water tanks at levels high enough to inflict a lethal dose to an exposed person in four hours, raising concerns that additional tanks are leaking.³

¹ *Tepco finds second pit leaking in Fukushima*, The Japan Times (Apr. 8, 2013).

² *Tank Has Leaked Tons of Contaminated Water at Japan Nuclear Site*, New York Times (Aug. 20, 2013).

³ *Japan Earmarks £300m+ for Fukushima Cleanup*, The Guardian (Sept. 3, 2013).

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Tepco also found that contaminated water continues to flow into the ocean at the rate of about 300 tons per day. Among other remedies, Japanese officials are considering building an underground frozen soil wall around the four damaged reactors to contain the pollution.⁴ At the same time, Japanese officials have announced that Tepco may need to release contaminated water from the tanks into the ocean, a proposal that Japanese fishermen have strongly opposed.⁵

This unfortunate chain of events raises two key issues. First, the Committee should confirm that this radioactive pollution will not affect the United States, its territories, and other countries bordering the Pacific Ocean. Some scientists have sought to calm such concerns by showing that the radiation will be diluted by the time it arrives on American shores.⁶ Second, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission created a task force to conduct short-term and long-term analysis of the lessons learned from the Fukushima disaster. Given what we know now about the challenges of dealing with radioactive wastewater, what additional lessons can the United States learn about how to respond to such a disaster?

Our Committee has held several hearings on the Fukushima disaster and the lessons learned from it. In light of these new developments, we believe it is time for another hearing to examine the most recent events.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Paul D. Tonko
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment
and the Economy

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Japan Fishermen Reject Release of Fukushima Water to Ocean*, Bloomberg (Sept. 6, 2013).

⁶ *Minority Staff Briefing with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission* (Sept. 6, 2013); *Hawaii Scientists Seek to Calm U.S. Fears about Fukushima Radiation*, Huffington Post (Sept. 3, 2013).